



SIMCOE MUSKOKA CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Parent/Guardian and Community Engagement Responding to Issues or Concerns Policy Number PGCE-08

The Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board (SMCDSB) is committed to building and maintaining positive relationships with students, staff members, parents and community partners. When concerns or issues arise, the Board will seek fair, timely, clear and equitable responses by following a defined Response and Resolution Procedure.

Procedural Guidelines Follow

Approved: Board Meeting #08-2018 (Monday, June 04, 2018)

Reviewed: Board Policy Review #03 (Wednesday, April 6, 2022)

Revised: Board Meeting #06 (Monday, April 25, 2022)

Procedural Guidelines Supporting Responding to Issues or Concerns

Policy Number PGCE-08

1. The Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board is committed to working cooperatively and responsibly with all stakeholders including students, staff members, parents and community partners.
2. The Board recognizes that, on occasion, issues or concerns arise and are brought to the attention of school-based staff, central staff or trustees.
3. For the purposes of this procedure, issues and concerns are defined in the following way:
 - Issue is used to describe dissatisfaction or criticism which is more general in nature, may have a broader impact, i.e., not necessarily specific or isolated to one particular complainant
 - Concern is used to describe dissatisfaction or criticism related to a matter which is more specific and directly related to the complainant
4. There are a number of ways in which an issue or concern may be brought to the attention of a staff member or a trustee, including, but not limited to:
 - Verbal - in-person or over the phone
 - Written - email, letter
 - Social Media - social networking sites, blogs and other online forums
 - Traditional Media - published/aired or brought to attention by a journalist as part of story research
 - Third-party - lawyer, human rights complaint
 - Community activism - petition, protest

Regardless of how issues and concerns are raised, it is the Board's desire to address them in a fair, respectful, equitable and timely manner by following the guiding principles outlined in this procedure.

5. *"It is a good thing to come to understand each other by learning to accept differences, by overcoming prejudices in mutual respect, and by working together for reconciliation."* (Pope St. John Paul II)

Catholic Social Teaching and the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations help guide us as we work to resolve issues in a way which emphasizes respect and the dignity of every person. To that end, the SMCDSB asks that all parties involved in addressing an issue or concern follow the established [Guidelines and Expectations for Fostering Respectful and Safe Environments](#).

6. Staff are not obligated to respond to or work towards resolving an issue or concern if:
 - They feel threatened or harassed
 - Offensive or hateful language is used
 - They are personally berated or insulted

- The complainant is asking for something which cannot realistically or reasonably be achieved

Disrespectful, threatening and harassing behaviour may result in further action by the Board.

7. There are some issues or concerns that may not be addressed by policy because they fall under the purview of another existing policy. These include, but are not limited to:
 - Anonymous issues or concerns (GP-17)
 - Transportation related issues or concerns (GP-13)
 - Workplace harassment (PS-04)
 - Code of Conduct (LE-05)
 - Safe Schools (LE-16 and LE-13)
 - School boundaries and boundary exemption (GP-15)
 - Admission to Schools (EP-01 and EP-07)
 - Health Care (LE-02)

Role of System Leaders and Trustees

8. When a system leader, i.e., member of the Education Leadership Council (ELC), principal, vice principal or manager is made aware of an issue or concern they will assist the process by:
 - Making the complainant aware of PGCE-08 Responding to Issues and Concerns, including the requirement of adhering to the Local Level Response prior to initiating a Formal Escalation Process
 - Providing the complainant with the [Guidelines and Expectations for Fostering Respectful and Safe Environments](#)
 - Ensure all impacted parties are duly aware and apprised of the issue or concern
 - Provide support and resources to help facilitate a response or resolution in an effort to keep it from entering into the Formal Escalation Process
9. When a trustee is made aware of an issue or concern, they will assist the process by:
 - Either referring the issue or concern to the Director of Education and/or
 - Make the complainant aware of PGCE-08 Responding to Issues and Concerns, including the requirement of adhering to the Local Level Response prior to initiating a Formal Escalation Process

PART A

First Step: Local Level Response

10. The people closest to the issue must always have the first opportunity to respond to an issue or concern, and work towards a resolution, where possible.



11. **The premise:** The individuals closest to an issue or concern (on both sides) have the most knowledge and the greatest vested interest in the situation, therefore they are also in the best position to deliver the most timely and appropriate response or resolution.
12. All parties should carefully review the [Guidelines and Expectations for Fostering Respectful and Safe Environments](#) and work collaboratively towards a **mutually** satisfactory response or resolution.
13. Addressing concerns and issues through the Local Level Response can be informal in nature, but it is recommended that the parties involved maintain some written documentation, where possible.
14. It is important to note that a mutually acceptable response or resolution **does not** necessarily mean that one party's desired outcome is achieved, but rather the issue/concern was addressed in a fair, reasonable and compassionate manner.
15. There are circumstances where, even after all reasonable efforts are made, a mutually satisfactory response or resolution cannot be achieved. In these circumstances, there is an option to address the issue or concern through a Formal Escalation Process.
16. An issue or concern cannot enter into the Formal Escalation Process until all parties directly involved have been provided with all the information related to the issue/concern and all reasonable opportunities to address the situation, as part of the Local Level Response, have been exhausted.

Second Step: Formal Escalation Process

17. If no satisfactory resolution or response is achieved at the Local Level of Response, the concern or issue may enter into a Formal Escalation Process.
18. In order to enter into the Formal Escalation Process, the complainant should put their concerns in writing, addressed to the appropriate member of the Education Leadership Council as per the Responding to Issues or Concerns section of the Board website. Once a request has been received by the ELC member or designate, the complainant can expect a communication to acknowledge receipt of the request.
19. There will be a determination whether the issue or concern has officially entered into the Formal Escalation Process. Every effort will be made to respond within three (3) to five (5) business days. Please note: the office is closed over the Christmas holidays and there are reduced operating hours during the summer vacation. If the matter does not enter into the Formal Escalation Process, the complainant is provided with an explanation. Some possible reasons for an issue or concern not proceeding into the Formal Escalation Process may include, but are not limited to:
 - The Local Level Response Process has not yet been initiated as the first course of action
 - The issue or concern was addressed appropriately at the Local Level Response phase and further escalation will not change the outcome
 - The issue or concern was addressed through another process or policy



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- The issue or concern has a widespread impact and will be referred to a Board Level Issues Management Process (see Part B below)
 - There is not enough information or detail to proceed
 - The complainant is acting in a threatening or harassing way
 - The complainant is using offensive or hateful language or is personally berating or insulting others
 - The request cannot realistically or reasonably be achieved and/or it is beyond the Board's mandate or purview
20. Once a concern/issue has entered into the Formal Escalation Process, the appropriate ELC member will take lead or assign it to another appropriate staff member (designate).
21. The ELC member or designate will be the main point of contact with the complainant and other impacted individuals.
22. When an issue enters into the Formal Escalation Process, impacted parties (as deemed appropriate to the issue), may be informed by the appropriate ELC member (or designate) of the initiation of the process. Impacted parties **may** include, but are not limited to:
- The complainant
 - Impacted staff members
 - Principal and/or vice-principal
 - Manager or supervisor
 - Appropriate ELC members
 - Association presidents
 - Appropriate trustee(s)
23. The process will be logged and tracked for reference.
24. The appropriate ELC member (designate) will work collaboratively to respond to or resolve the issue or concern. It is important to note that the response or resolution **may not** result in the desired outcome for the complainant, but rather the issue/concern was addressed in the best way possible given all the information available and realities of the situation.
25. Updates will be provided by the ELC member (designate) to impacted individuals (as deemed appropriate to the situation), in a timely manner throughout the process, and every effort will be made to respond or resolve issues or concerns in a reasonable time frame.
26. Once a response or resolution has been achieved, impacted parties, as appropriate to the situation, will be informed of the outcome.
27. Once an issue or concern has gone through the Formal Escalation Process and a response has been provided to the complainant, the matter will be considered resolved and cannot be reconsidered or appealed.



PART B

Widespread Issues or Concerns (Board Level Issues Management Process)

28. From time to time, there are incidents or issues that create widespread concern or impact several individuals or an entire school community.
29. In these instances, the response and resolution process may be addressed through a Board Level Issues Management Process.
30. A Response and Resolution Escalation request may be made by one or many individuals, however, the issue will not be addressed using the Formal Escalation Process.
31. When an issue enters the Board Level Issues Management Process, the appropriate ELC member (designate) is assigned and will work collaboratively with the Manager of Communications and Strategic Initiatives to develop a central issues/communications management plan, which may include, but is not limited to:
 - Tracking and/or monitoring public responses
 - Responding to public inquiries as appropriate
 - Providing scripts for front line staff
 - Developing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents
 - Providing ongoing updates to the community using a variety of communications tactics
 - Providing opportunities for public consultation, which may include surveys and forums
 - Responding to media inquiries
32. As is the case with the Local Level Response and Formal Escalation Process, the Board Level Issues Management Process, the [Guidelines and Expectations for Fostering Respectful and Safe Environments](#) must be followed.
33. The appropriate ELC member (designate) will work collaboratively and to the best of their ability to respond to or resolve the issue or concern. It is important to note that the response or resolution may not result in the desired outcome for all parties involved, but rather the issue/concern was addressed to the best of everyone's abilities, given all the information available and realities of the situation.
34. It is important to note that widespread issues tend to be more complex in nature, and working towards a response or resolution may involve outside parties such as emergency services, public health, Ministry of Education, transportation services, other levels of government, community agencies, industry experts, legal representation, etc.
35. The Board Level Issues Management process may also include a public consultation process in order to gather more generalized input from all impacted parties, this could include public forums, surveys or focus groups.



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36. Given the complexity of issues that enter into the Board Level Issues Management Process, impacted parties or concerned stakeholders should be aware that this may have an effect on response times and the ability to achieve a timely resolution and/or final response.

As part of the issues/communications plan, Board staff is committed to providing regular updates to impacted parties, as deemed appropriate to the situation, throughout the process.

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